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SUBJECT: GOH CONSIDERS FORMING A GENDARMERIE

REF: Paris 4786

(U) Sensitive but unclassified protect accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On the eve of his visit to Paris June 29-30, President Preval publicly floated the idea of creating a Gendarmerie in Haiti, and requested French assistance with this project. The GOH wants to create a new force that could assume some of the security functions currently performed by MINUSTAH, as well as to free the police from functions for which it is ill-suited (e.g., prison security; maritime control) in order to focus on core public safety tasks. A French team visited Port-au-Prince July 18-22 for exploratory discussions with the GOH, but was non-committal as to eventual support for a Haitian gendarmerie. End summary.

Preval's Plans for a Gendarmerie

¶2. (U) In a June 27 interview with French daily Le Monde, President Preval responded to a journalist's question about creation of a gendarmerie. He said There needs to be a unit to provide frontier security; to protect public buildings, ports, airports; to intervene in cases of natural disaster; to stop contraband, and to participate in tasks such as forest protection. I want to reflect on ways these functions can be linked to required national service, which is provided for in the constitution. During his Paris visit, Preval formally requested assistance from the GOF to create a French-style gendarmerie.

French Evaluation Team Visits Port-au-Prince

¶3. (U) A two-person French team visited Port-au-Prince July 18-22 to follow up on the idea. Led by Contrôleur Général de la Police Paquy and including Lt. Col Cousin of the human resources office of the French Gendarmerie, the team met July 21 with ADCM and representatives of the DAO, MLO, and Narcotics Affairs Section. While in Port-au-Prince, the team met with President Preval, the Minister of Justice, the Secretaries of State for Public Safety, the Director General of the National Police, and Presidential Advisor Bob Manuel, as well as MINUSTAH officials and other donors involved in support to the justice and security sector. At the Embassy meeting, USG participants briefed on current training and assistance programs for the police and coast guard, and discussed the challenges of working to improve these institutions.

¶4. (U) According to the French, the GOH plan is to create a force that would be able to replace capabilities currently provided by MINUSTAH but that eventually must be assumed by Haitians. The government also wants to free the police from performing functions other than its core public safety responsibilities. A gendarmerie could also be a vehicle for instituting a national service requirement in Haiti, the French said. They noted that the current constitution provides for both a police force and a military force.

¶5. (SBU) The French team members privately told DCM that they were disappointed by the meeting with Preval. He offered no vision and no clear idea what he wanted from the gendarmerie. They got more out of their session with Preval advisor Bob Manuel. He proposed a gendarmerie that would focus on (1) response to natural disasters, (2) firefighting, (3) prison management and security, (4) border security and control, and (5) maritime security.

¶6. (SBU) The French team seemed somewhat skeptical of beginning a program to support a Haitian gendarmerie at this time. Lt. Col. Cousin commented that, if they started now, they would probably come back in five years to find that all their work had been destroyed. But the French team members admitted they would not make the final decision, but would merely present a recommendation for consideration at more senior levels of the GOF. They promised to inform the embassy of any decision to proceed with support to a Haitian gendarmerie.

Comment

¶7. (SBU) It is sensible to begin thinking about Haitian security needs in a post-MINUSTAH environment. The GOH has correctly identified a number of functions in which its security services lack the necessary capacity. In view of the problems the GOH already has in financing, staffing, and training the HNP, however, it is far from clear that creating a new security structure is a wise course of action. If the GOH does go forward to establish a gendarmerie, the USG will need to ensure proper coordination with existing USG programs that already support the police, coast guard, and justice sector.

SANDERSON